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I

STEPHEN B. DOBRANSKI

Milton's social life

That eight biographies of John Milton were written within sixty years of his death in 1674 not only demonstrates the popularity of his works during the first half of the eighteenth century, but also suggests the enduring strength of Milton's personality. Because most of these accounts were published with editions of Milton's works, readers became accustomed to interpreting his writings biographically. Milton still had his detractors – William Winstanley in his 1687 dictionary of English poets, for example, dismissed Milton as 'a notorious Traytor' who had 'most impiously and villanously bely'd that blessed Martyr, King *Charles* the First' (195) – but such attacks only encouraged readers to approach Milton's works as a function of his identity. As Samuel Johnson complained in his *Lives of the English Poets*, the 'blaze' of Milton's reputation was preventing people from examining his poetry objectively (1: 163, 165).

Much of the information in Milton's early biographies came from Milton himself, a useful but not entirely reliable source. Whereas we know relatively little about other contemporary writers, Milton includes provocative autobiographical digressions in some of his poems and pamphlets, as if inviting readers to organize his works according to his sense of them. He describes his aspirations and experiences in *The Reason of Church-Government* (1642), *An Apology Against a Pamphlet* (1642), and *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda* (1654), and continues to construct a narrative of his poetic progress in other publications such as his collected *Poems* (1645, 1673) and *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674). If scholars in discussing his works have overemphasized Milton's agency, the blame lies at least in part with Milton: his strong authorial voice has virtually drowned out the social conditions of his writing and publishing.

In its most recent and extreme form, this image of Milton as an independent author has mutated into the caricature of an isolated pedant. We imagine an aloof and avid scholar, cut off from seventeenth-century culture and holding conversation exclusively with Homer, Virgil, and God.

Rumours about Milton's domestic life also conjure the dubious but compelling image of a brilliant blind man bullying his frightened daughters for the sake of his art. And how can modern readers not feel daunted by Milton? Introducing a selection of his works, the editors of *The Norton Anthology* coolly observe that 'in his time' he 'likely' 'read just about everything of importance written in English, Latin, Greek, and Italian', adding parenthetically that 'of course, he had the Bible by heart' (1: 1434).

To remedy the misapprehension of Milton's autonomy, we need to approach him as a working writer and acknowledge the various social sites of his authorship. As epic poet and political pamphleteer; defender of divorce and supporter of regicide; teacher, businessman, and government employee – Milton was necessarily influenced by his changing historical circumstances. Reading beyond the persona of the independent poet that Milton implies in many of his texts, we discover a complex, sometimes inconsistent writer, predisposed to socializing and dependent on his friends and acquaintances as part of the creative process.

From an entry in Milton's handwriting in his family's Bible we learn that he was born on Friday, 9 December 1608, at 6.30 am; he was baptized eleven days later in the parish church of All Hallows, Bread Street. Milton's boyhood home in the heart of London afforded the young poet little opportunity for quiet and seclusion. Growing up amid merchants and drinking houses and not far from London's busiest business district in Old Cheap, Milton must have become accustomed at an early age to the noise and activity of the city. The family's six-storey tenement was in a building, the White Bear, occupied by at least seven other residents. Milton's family consisted of his parents, older sister Anne, and younger brother Christopher; his father, the elder John Milton, was a Scrivener (a trade involving money-lending and deed-writing) and may also have invited his apprentices to live with the family, as was common practice. In addition to servants, nurses, and tutors, the home saw the visits of various composers seeking the elder Milton's company: the poet's father had become well known as a musician, and the White Bear may have been the scene of musical performances for select audiences. Although we know considerably less about Sara Milton, the poet's mother, she too was active in the surrounding parish. In one of the few references that Milton makes about her in print, he notes her reputation throughout the neighbourhood for her acts of charity.

That Milton's parents arranged for a formal portrait of him to be painted at age ten suggests, as William Riley Parker has observed, both the family's pride and prosperity (8). The painter, commonly thought to be Cornelius

Janssen, has captured a serious-looking boy, not completely comfortable in his genteel doublet and starched collar. Milton's close-cropped haircut was probably given him by Thomas Young, his first preceptor. Again Milton's parents were indulging in behaviour more typical of the gentry than the middle class: before beginning formal schooling, Milton was taught at home, first by his father, then by the Scottish minister Young. Although Young may have occupied this position for only a few years, he later played an important role in the antiprelatical controversy of the 1640s and probably influenced Milton's early Presbyterian sympathies.

According to Milton's widow, it was around age ten that the author composed his first poetry, now lost. The earliest surviving works by Milton that we can confidently identify are his English translations of Psalms 114 and 136, which he wrote at age fifteen, perhaps as an assignment during his last year at St Paul's School. The language of these poems reflects Milton's early interest in Ovid and Propertius; the fact that he chose to translate songs from the Old Testament suggests his religious conviction and his father's musical influence. Although few records exist about Milton's time at St Paul's, we know that he learned to read and write Latin fluently, and eventually studied Greek and Hebrew. There he befriended the under-usher, Alexander Gil, Jr, with whom he would continue to exchange poetry and correspondence after graduating. Also at St Paul's, Milton formed a special friendship with one of his schoolmates, Charles Diodati. From their surviving correspondence (Diodati's written in Greek, Milton's in Latin) we sense that this relationship was important for both young men; Milton wrote at least four of his early verses to or about Diodati.

Finishing at St Paul's in 1624, Milton began attending Christ's College, Cambridge, where he would ultimately earn his BA in 1629 and graduate *cum laude* with his MA three years later. At Cambridge, Milton claimed to have received 'more then ordinary favour and respect . . . above any of my equals' (YP 1: 884). Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips, also reports that the author 'was lov'd and admir'd by the whole University, particularly by the Fellows and most Ingenious Persons of his House'. When Milton left Cambridge, Phillips claims, it caused 'no small trouble' to his 'Fellow-Collegiates, who in general regretted his Absence' (Darbishire, 54, 55). Even if we suspect Milton and Phillips of overstating Milton's reputation, his peers liked him well enough to invite him to speak at various university functions. The sly allusions and coarse puns in Milton's surviving Latin orations imply that he had a good rapport with members of the college. Thus, as the biographer Christopher Hill suggests, Milton's university nickname 'the Lady of Christ's' need not have been pejorative (35). In his vacation exercise, Milton seems to appreciate such humour as he playfully

derides his classmates' poor grammar and devises a list of bawdy explanations for the epithet.

During this time, Milton stayed in contact with Thomas Young, and probably formed lasting relationships with some of his acquaintances from Cambridge, such as Henry More, an undergraduate with Milton; Joseph Meade, a Fellow of Christ's College; Thomas Bainbrigge, the Master of Christ's; and the Reverend Nathaniel Tovey, Milton's second tutor at Christ's. In *An Apology Against a Pamphlet*, Milton refers to the 'many Letters full of kindness and loving respect' that he received from his friends at Cambridge both before and after his graduation (YP 1: 884). Surely Milton would have stayed in contact with his 'learned Friend' Edward King, whose tragic death in 1637 inspired *Lycidas* and with whom, Edward Phillips claims, Milton had 'contracted a particular Friendship and Intimacy' (Darbishire, 54).

In Milton's familiar letters we glimpse not a reclusive scholar but an author who so enjoyed companionship that, hearing on one occasion of Charles Diodati's visit to London, he dashed 'straightway and as if by storm' ('*confestim & quasi autoboei proripui me ad cellam tuam*') to meet his boyhood friend (CM 12: 20-1). While not all Milton's friendships were as intimate as his relationship with Diodati, Milton's enthusiasm for his former schoolfellow contributes to our sense of the social author. 'Why do you complain that poetry is a fugitive from wine and feasting?' ('*Quid quereris refugam vino dapibusque poesin?*' line 13), Milton asks his friend in Elegy 6, referring to the classical tradition that associates inspiration and pleasure. In one of Milton's oratorical exercises from Cambridge, he admits that those who immerse themselves in study 'find it much easier to converse with gods than with men' (YP 1: 295). On the other hand, Milton claims, no one cultivates a friendship more diligently than a man who has devoted himself to learning. For Milton, 'the chief part of human happiness is derived from the society of one's fellows and the formation of friendships' (CM 12: 262).

Not all of Milton's memories of Cambridge would have been pleasant, however. In 1626 he was suspended and briefly returned to his parents' home in London. Although the exact reason for Milton's suspension remains unknown, it may have involved his first tutor, William Chappell, reputedly a strict disciplinarian. The seventeenth-century biographer John Aubrey recorded that Milton received 'some unkindnesse' from Chappell and has added in the margin, 'whip't him' (Darbishire, 10).

It is the six years after Milton left Cambridge that modern critics have especially characterized as a period of intense study and isolation. From 1632 to 1635, Milton lived with his parents in Hammersmith, a suburban

town about six or seven miles west of St Paul's Cathedral, and from 1635 to 1638 the family resided at Horton, a town even further west, approximately seventeen miles outside of London. Living with his family outside of London, away from the distractions that the city offered, Milton no doubt had ample opportunity to concentrate on his studies. In a letter to Charles Diodati from London in 1637, Milton compares his friend's reading habits with his own:

I know your method of studying to be so arranged that you frequently take breath in the middle, visit your friends, write much, sometimes make a journey, whereas my genius is such that no delay, no rest, no care or thought almost of anything, holds me aside until I reach the end I am making for, and round off, as it were, some great period of my studies. (CM 12: 18–19)

The entries in Milton's Commonplace Book also attest to the extensive reading that he accomplished after graduating from Cambridge, and in *Defensio Secunda* Milton specifically recalls his time in the country as a period of intense study: 'At my father's country place, wither he had retired to spend his declining years, I devoted myself entirely to the study of Greek and Latin writers, completely at leisure' (YP 4: 613–14).

Although such claims suggest Milton's passion for learning, we ought not to mistake his avidity for reclusiveness. Milton says not that he but that his father had retired to the country. When he does refer to his own retirement in Elegy 1 to Charles Diodati, he is most likely writing euphemistically about his suspension from Cambridge in 1626. In this poem Milton at first claims that his books are his life and that he devotes his time to them and the Muses ('*Tempora nam licet hic placidis dare libera Musis, / Et totum rapiunt me mea vita libri*', lines 25–6) – but here, too, he admits to his friend that he frequents the theatre and often enjoys leaving the city to watch young women.

Milton's letters and publications suggest that even while living in Hammersmith and Horton he travelled frequently and socialized often. In *Defensio Secunda* he fondly remembers travelling to London, 'exchanging the country for the city, either to purchase books or to become acquainted with some new discovery in mathematics or music' (YP 4: 614). Living with his family in the country posed little difficulty for such journeys: he needed only two hours to travel from Horton to London, and travelling from the suburb of Hammersmith to London required considerably less time. Rather than secluding himself at his parents' home to pursue his studies, Milton may have chosen to live with his family out of convenience. Just out of college, he had not yet chosen a vocation and had no ostensible means of supporting himself while formulating his plans. Milton writes in

The Reason of Church-Government that he had been preparing from his earliest youth for a career in the ministry 'by the intentions of my parents and friends . . . and in mine own resolutions' (YP 1: 822). He became disillusioned, however, by the clergy's corrupt practices. In his own words, he was 'Church-outed by the Prelats' (YP 1: 823), that is, he grew so disgusted with the Episcopal form of church-government that he could not in good conscience be ordained.

This decision must have come as a disappointment to Milton's parents, in particular his father, whom Milton credits with providing his education. In the poem *Ad Patrem* Milton thanks his father for not forcing him into business or law, and tries to convince him that his own musical abilities resemble his son's poetic skills. We may detect a similarly defensive tone in a letter Milton penned to an unknown friend shortly after graduating from Cambridge. Milton denies that he has chosen a life of seclusion. Although he admits that 'I am something suspicious of my selfe, & doe take notice of a certaine belatednesse in me' (CM 12: 325), he insists that he is not indulging in 'the endlesse delight of speculation'; on the contrary, he is preparing himself for his career, 'not taking thought of beeing late so it give advantage to be more fit' (CM 12: 324).

As part of this preparation, Milton found his acquaintances and friends especially useful. In 1633 Milton received an invitation from the Countess-Dowager of Derby to contribute to an entertainment called *Arcades*, which her family had planned in her honour; and his decision one year later to write *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* again grew out of an association with the Egerton family, specifically the Earl of Bridgewater, the step-son to the Countess-Dowager. Although Milton may have agreed to compose these courtly entertainments because he was considering the Egertons as potential patrons, we do not know why the family chose to have Milton write for them. One of the most highly regarded families in England, the Egertons could have presumably called upon a writer with a more established reputation, someone like Ben Jonson, rather than selecting a relatively inexperienced young poet from Hammersmith.

If Milton had indeed led a secluded life, he would not have earned such prestigious, aristocratic commissions. Nor would he have written two affectionately humorous poems to the University Mail Carrier, Hobson, on his death in January 1631; versions of these poems circulated in manuscript and were printed in three separate verse collections. It also seems unlikely that a shy, bookish young man would have published *Lycidas* or 'An Epitaph on the admirable Dramaticke Poet W. Shakespeare'. In the former case, Milton's reputation at the university surely recommended him as a contributor to *Justa Edouardo King*, the 1638 anthology of poems com-

memorating his late friend; and the inclusion of Milton's 'Epitaph' in the Second Folio of Shakespeare's plays raises the possibility that members of the book trade – perhaps through his father's intervention? – were also familiar with Milton as early as the 1630s.

'An Epitaph on . . . Shakespeare' was probably not, however, Milton's first published poem: he may have had published an earlier work while still at Cambridge. In a letter to Alexander Gil, Jr, dated 2 July 1628, Milton refers to the customary commencement verses that a fellow of his college asked him to write. He enclosed a printed copy of the verses with his letter as a gift for Gil to judge, but because Gil's copy is now lost, we cannot determine which poem Milton composed and had printed for this event – perhaps *Naturam non pati senium*, or, more likely, *De Idea Platonica*.

In all these instances – *Arcades*, *A Masque*, the Hobson poems, *Lycidas*, 'An Epitaph on . . . Shakespeare', and the commencement verses – Milton was writing for or about someone else. Collectively, these texts suggest the social nature of even his earliest authorship; he was familiar with both the courtly world of the Egertons and the culture of printing. In both contexts, what Milton wrote and where his writing appeared depended on the interaction and collaboration of a number of agents – even if we do not know for certain who those agents were. As E. M. W. Tillyard has observed, Milton 'first broke silence concerning his poetic ambitions' in 1628 at age nineteen when he delivered the annual vacation exercise at Cambridge, a public occasion, which 'argues something very different from the instinct of isolation' (170).

The success of Milton's subsequent trip to the continent exemplifies his sociability. Following the death of his mother in April 1637, the author undertook a fifteen-month Italian journey that brought him in contact with people who continued to influence his writing throughout his life. Accompanied by a servant and armed with letters of introduction from friends such as senior diplomat Sir Henry Wotton and court musician Henry Lawes, Milton was able to put aside his anti-Catholicism and 'at once became the friend of many gentlemen eminent in rank and learning, whose private academies I frequented' (YP 4: 614–15). In Italy he was befriended by, among others, the scholar Carlo Dati, the nobleman Giovanni Battista Manso, the theologian Giovanni Diodati (Charles Diodati's uncle), and the poet Antonio Malatesti; he also visited Hugo Grotius in Paris and, very likely, Galileo in Florence. In *Defensio Secunda* Milton describes his Italian trip not in terms of the places or things he saw but in terms of the people he met. In order to establish his credibility and illustrate that 'I have always led a pure and honourable life' (YP 4: 611), Milton would naturally have emphasized his distinguished foreign acquaintances. But his praise for

Italian academies exceeds the requirements of the rhetorical occasion; from among his many experiences abroad, he celebrates this one institution, 'which deserves great praise not only for promoting humane studies but also for encouraging friendly intercourse' (YP 4: 615–16).

Milton's Italian journey was a manifestation of his social nature complementary to, not in conflict with, the behaviour he exhibited while with his family. In Italian academies he found a public model for what he had already pursued with Diodati, Gil, and his other Cambridge and London acquaintances. Instead of closeting himself away to compose his works, Milton was inspired by and wrote about social occasions; instead of trying to control all aspects of his publications, he developed a method of authorship that was similarly 'social' – that is, he solicited friends' advice while writing his works, shared printed and scribal copies with friends, and depended on members of the book trade in publishing his texts. He even needed his acquaintances to help him distribute his poems. As J. W. Saunders has observed, Milton would later ask friends, such as Andrew Marvell and Henry Oldenburg, to act as his 'postmen' and circulate complimentary copies of his works in England and on the continent (89).

To understand why so many critics have overlooked this social dimension of Milton's works, we need to examine the authorial persona he helped to create during the antiprelatical controversy of the 1640s. In late January 1639 Charles I had declared war against Scotland over its rejection of the Episcopal policies that he wanted to enforce on the Presbyterian Church. Scottish success in defying the King's authority encouraged a resistance of national proportions. Although Milton had already criticized the Episcopal clergy in *Lycidas* – there he describes bishops as worldly-minded shepherds who 'for their bellies sake, / Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold' (lines 114–15) – he now focused his energies more fully on the debate against Episcopacy and wrote five prose tracts during a period of twelve months. Returning from Italy prematurely in 1639, he joined forces with 'Smectymnuus', a group of Presbyterian clerics who defined their collective identity by combining their initials – Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen, and William Spurstowe. These five men collaborated on a pair of treatises and probably invited Milton to assist them. Young had tutored Milton in Bread Street, and Newcomen and Spurstowe, Milton's contemporaries at Cambridge, would have heard the young author delivering his speech in 1627 at the college's annual vacation exercise.

Ironically, Milton's church-government pamphlets, though produced through a social process, first established the perception of the author as a solitary figure; Milton emerged from the debate against Episcopacy with a

discrete, authorial identity. His first three pamphlets appeared anonymously – *Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline in England* (May 1641), *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* (June or July 1641), and *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defence* (July 1641). However, with the fourth tract, *The Reason of Church-Government Urg'd against Prelaty* (January or February 1642), not only does the title page read 'By Mr. John Milton', but the preface to Book 2 addresses Milton's career as a poet. In the middle of the pamphlet, Milton turns away from his argument about the bishops to talk about himself.

The specific author we encounter in *The Reason of Church-Government* is the aloof and avid scholar who has mesmerized modern critics. This persona serves in part as an ethical proof: Milton portrays himself as a bookish young man who has chosen to endure the 'unlearned drudgery' of his Episcopal opponents and is magnanimously sacrificing 'a calme and pleasing solitarynes' (YP 1: 821–2). Milton contrasts the dishonest prelates' self-interested motives with his own desire 'to impart and bestow without any gain to himselfe . . . sharp, but saving words' (YP 1: 804). He characterizes his opponents as pseudo-intellectuals, 'men whose learning and beleif [*sic*] lies in marginal stuffings' (YP 1: 822). He, on the other hand, has been training to become a national poet, 'to be an interpreter & relater of the best and sagest things among mine own Citizens throughout this Iland in the mother dialect' (YP 1: 811–12). Whereas he has the use 'but of my left hand' in this present prose controversy, he claims to be 'led by the genial power of nature' to a higher, poetic task (YP 1: 808). He announces audaciously – and with uncanny accuracy – 'I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die' (YP 1: 810).

In his next prose tract, Milton continued to construct this authorial persona in the process of refuting an ad hominem attack on his character. In January 1642, around the same time that *The Reason of Church-Government* was published, an anonymous author lashed out at the 'grim, lowring, bitter fool' who had written *Animadversions*. Three months later, Milton responded with *An Apology Against a Pamphlet Called A Modest Confutation* (April 1642), again emphasizing his virtue and learning. Here he offers his famous prescription that 'he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to bee a true Poem' (YP 1: 890). Whether Milton actually lived up to this high standard, we do not know. But in describing his studies and forecasting his accomplishments, he had already begun to draft for us the 'Poem' of his life – and it remains one of the things he left 'written to aftertimes' that critics have refused to let die.

Rather than distracting Milton from his future poetic endeavours, his prose-writing thus complemented them. Milton relied on his participation in the debate against Episcopacy both to forge his individual identity and assist his development as a writer. The experience he gained as a pamphleteer – first during the antiprelatical debate, later during the divorce controversy and as a defender of Commonwealth and regicide – helped him to mature as an author; it enabled him to fulfil the role he casts for himself in *The Reason of Church-Government*.

During the 1640s Milton was also establishing his career as a teacher and at the encouragement of Samuel Hartlib would eventually commit his pedagogical philosophy to print in a small treatise entitled *Of Education* (June 1644). Taking up residence in London after his journey to Italy, Milton began a school with two pupils, his sister's sons, John and Edward Phillips, aged eight and nine. It was also at this time that Milton composed and had published separately *Epitaphium Damonis* (1640), his elegy to his recently deceased friend, Charles Diodati: in the guise of a shepherd, the poet mourns his lost companion and wonders who will now inspire him with conversation and song.

In *Epitaphium Damonis* and *Mansus*, another Latin poem probably composed around 1638–9, Milton continues to discuss his poetic aspirations, specifically raising the possibility of writing a longer work about various British and biblical subjects. Milton was turning his thoughts away from the pastoral mode to a more ambitious genre. From seven pages of his surviving manuscript notes, we know that he was considering an epic about King Arthur or King Alfred, as well as a play about such topics as Abraham, John the Baptist, 'Sodom Burning', 'Moabitides or Phineas', or 'Christus Patiens'. Perhaps most notably, he began outlining ideas for a tragedy to be called 'Adam unparadiz'd' or 'Paradise Lost' (French, 2: 3–4).

Financially, though, even Milton's greatest poetic achievements would never be especially rewarding. During the seventeenth century writers were sometimes paid a small sum for their work, but only when publishers were confident of books selling well. More often authors turned over their manuscripts to printers and received a few complimentary copies; or they subsidized the publication themselves, sometimes with the help of a patron. Milton's contract with Samuel Simmons for the publication of *Paradise Lost* in 1667 remains the earliest surviving formal agreement of its kind in England: Milton received £5 up front and £5 (along with perhaps 200 copies) at the end of the first three impressions. Although these terms were fair by seventeenth-century standards, Milton could hardly support his family on this income. For much of his life he instead lived off the interest from his father's, and subsequently his own, loans and investments.

Sometime around 1627, for example, Milton's father had lent Richard Powell of Oxfordshire £300 with a £500 bond. In June 1642 Milton travelled to Oxfordshire – according to Edward Phillips, 'no body about him certainly knowing the Reason' (Darbishire, 63). We do know, however, that one month later Milton returned to London with a seventeen-year-old bride, Powell's eldest daughter Mary, and the promise of a £1000 dowry which he would never receive. When Mary Powell went to visit her family in Oxfordshire about a month after the marriage, she refused to come back to London. Milton's letters to her were unanswered, and an emissary sent to inquire after her was, according to Milton's nephew, turned away 'with some sort of Contempt' (Darbishire, 65).

Had Milton originally travelled to Oxfordshire for the express purpose of collecting his father's debt, of securing a bride, or of visiting friends and relatives in the area? Did Mary Powell refuse to return to her husband because she was unhappy with him, because her family needed her assistance, or because she was homesick? One seventeenth-century biographer suggests that Milton's bride 'had bin bred in a family of plenty and freedom' and did not like her new husband's 'reserv'd manner of life' (Darbishire, 22). Surely Powell's reluctance to return to Milton was exacerbated by the mounting hostility between the King and Parliament. As the controversy over church-government escalated from a religious to political conflict, Charles I had set up headquarters in Oxford, making travel between Oxford and London dangerous and complicating efforts for the estranged couple to communicate and thus reconcile. Also politics may have played a role in keeping the couple apart: Milton sided with Parliament; the Powell family were staunch Royalists.

While we may be tempted to interpret Milton's ensuing pamphlets defending divorce as merely personal, an entry in his *Commonplace Book* indicates that he had begun thinking about the institution of divorce prior to his own marriage. Of course, his experience with Mary Powell must have prompted his sudden enthusiasm to pursue the subject in print. But nowhere in his four divorce tracts – *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (August 1643; February 1644), *The Judgement of Martin Bucer* (July 1644), *Tetrachordon* (March 1645), and *Colasterion* (March 1645) – does Milton address his own situation with Mary Powell, nor, more generally, does he discuss desertion as grounds for divorce. Instead he appeals to his readers' reason and focuses attention on the references to divorce in the Old and New Testaments. For Milton, marriage represents 'the apt and cheerfull conversation of man with woman, to comfort and refresh him against the evill of solitary life' (YP 2: 235). Writing at a time when divorce was permitted only in cases of adultery, he took the radical

position of emphasizing spiritual compatibility. If a man and woman did not get along, Milton argued, then their relationship undermined God's reason for creating matrimony. A marriage between two incompatible people was not, according to Milton, a marriage at all.

Milton and Mary Powell were ultimately reconciled in 1645, and they stayed together until she died in 1652, a few days after giving birth to their third daughter, Deborah. Although early biographers may be overstating the case in praising the poet's 'Gentleness and Humanity' for agreeing to take back his wife 'after she had so obstinately absented from him' (Darbishire, 31), Milton at least deserves credit for the generosity he showed the Powell family. In addition to waiving some of the money that the Powells owed him, he agreed shortly after his wife's return to have her mother, father, and an unknown number of her brothers and sisters temporarily share his new house in Barbican. Along with the poet's father, and soon afterwards, the couple's first daughter, Anne, Milton once again found himself living in a crowded, hectic household.

Perhaps to help put the controversy of his divorce pamphlets behind him, Milton decided in 1645 to have his collected *Poems* published; by then, at least five writers had criticized his position on marriage in print. In the same year Milton published his last two divorce tracts, *Tetrachordon* (meaning 'four-stringed'), which discusses four passages in scripture that deal with marriage; and *Colasterion* (meaning 'instrument of punishment'), in which he refutes one of his anonymous detractors. If *Tetrachordon's* scholarly method and tone contribute to the perception Milton cultivated elsewhere of the withdrawn poet-scholar, *Colasterion* reveals the author at his most vehemently human. Angry at being misunderstood, he lashes out, sometimes cruelly, dismissing his opponent as a 'fleamy clodd' (YP 2: 740), an 'Idiot by breeding' (YP 2: 741), and 'a presumptuous lozel' (YP 2: 756). Years later in *Defensio Secunda* Milton would regret that he had ever written his divorce tracts in English, wishing instead that he had used Latin to target his ideas to a more select audience.

Milton's 1645 *Poems*, by comparison, sidesteps or soft-pedals his early radicalism, avoiding almost all references to the Civil War and the prose controversies in which he had participated. Entitled *Poems of Mr. John Milton, both English and Latin, Compos'd at Several Times*, the collection comprises fifty-four poems, including all of those, such as *A Mask*, *Epitaphium Damonis*, and 'An Epitaph on . . . Shakespeare', that had previously been published anonymously. Here the book's publisher Humphrey Moseley presents these verses as the work of a learned gentleman: the Milton whom we encounter in 1645 has written for clergy and aristocrats; has composed poems in English, Latin, Greek, and Italian; and

has received, as the book again and again avers, '*the highest Commendations and Applause of the learnedst Academicks, both domestick and forrein*' (CM 1: 414). Once again, Milton emerges as a social author, depending on the assistance of various people to produce his collected works. In addition to collaborating with material agents of production, he has addressed individual poems to friends, and his various acquaintances have contributed laudatory verses and letters.

A year before the first edition of the *Poems* was published, Milton wrote *Areopagitica* (November 1644), a landmark argument against censorship and a defence of the type of collaborative production that his collected verses manifest. This tract represents another of Milton's more personal treatises, written on behalf of his friends in the book trade as well as in response to critics like the preacher Herbert Palmer, who had favoured censorship in his attack on Milton's divorce pamphlets. Three months before the publication of *Areopagitica*, a petition of the Stationers' Company to the House of Commons (24 August 1644) had also objected to the unlicensed publication of Milton's divorce tracts. By not having a license to print his works, Milton and the pamphlet's publisher were disregarding the Long Parliament's Order for Printing (14 June 1643), which stipulated that all printed matter be first approved and licensed by a government agent, then officially entered in the *Register* of the Stationers' Company.

In *Areopagitica* Milton suggests that book-writing and book-making require a more involved practice than such licensing acts allowed. Rather than sanctioning a select group of agents – whether licensors or monopolists – to regulate the book trade, Milton advocates a social process by which knowledge is shared. He wants to remove pre-publication censorship so as to transfer the control of knowledge from a few, ignorant men, whom Parliament had empowered, to the trade's many agents, whose dynamic interaction would lead to the increase of truth. Whereas Parliament's policy of pre-publication licensing represented an attempt to master a potentially threatening force, Milton foresaw the central role that the printing press would come to play and aligned its unfettered operation 'with truth, with learning, and the Commonwealth' (YP 2: 488).

It was around this time that Milton probably started work on both a theological treatise and a chronicle of British history up to the Norman Conquest. Although he did not publish another prose work until the end of the Civil War – when he had printed a defence of regicide, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* – he remained active, sociable, and involved during the intervening four years. Milton continued with his teaching and perhaps began composing his *Artis Logicae* and another pamphlet, *A Brief History*

of *Moscovia*. He also continued to be inspired by specific people and events: in addition to writing two sonnets about the divorce controversy, he composed a sonnet to the musician Henry Lawes, who had collaborated with him on the songs for his court entertainments; he wrote a sonnet to his friend Catharine Thomason, the wife of the bookseller and collector George Thomason; and when the copy of his 1645 *Poems* was lost or pilfered from the library at Oxford University, Milton composed an elaborate Latin ode to the librarian John Rouse.

Politically, Milton now allied himself with the Independents. While he had found it convenient to work with Presbyterians during the antiprelatical controversy, he came to suspect that they had opposed the king for their own personal gain. In 'On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament' Milton criticizes Presbyterians for committing some of the same mistakes as the Prelates they ousted. 'New *Presbyter* is but old *Priest* writ large' (line 20), he complains in this poem. He specifically opposed the Presbyterian policies of tithes and pluralities, and, as a tolerationist, objected to their using political power to impose religious doctrines.

Milton developed his attack on Presbyterians in his twelfth prose work, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (February 1649). In contrast to those 'Malignant backsliders' who 'are onely verbal against the pulling down or punishing of Tyrants' (YP 3: 222, 255), Milton insists on the need to punish the king and carry the Civil War through to its logical conclusion. Published days after Charles I's execution, the tract does not explicitly identify the king as a tyrant; instead, Milton argues theoretically that people have the right and obligation to hold all kings and magistrates accountable. He emphasizes that 'Justice is the onely true sovrain and supreme Majesty upon earth' and that 'justice don upon a Tyrant is no more but the necessary self-defence of a whole Common wealth' (YP 3: 237, 254).

Despite taking such a decisive stand against monarchy, Milton claimed to be surprised one month later when Oliver Cromwell and the newly formed government approached him about working for the republic. Recollecting the offer, in *Defensio Secunda* he again cast himself as a withdrawn and isolated poet, dragged reluctantly into the public arena, just as he had alleged during the antiprelatical controversy. He had completed four books of *The History of Britain*, 'when lo! . . . the council of state, as it is called, now first constituted by authority of parliament, invited me to lend them my services in the department more particularly of foreign affairs – an event which had never entered my thoughts!' (CM 8: 137–9).

For the next eleven years as secretary under the Commonwealth, Milton served primarily as a translator. He translated into Latin the Council of

State's foreign correspondence, worked as an interpreter at conferences between Council members and visiting ambassadors, and translated into English letters that the Council received from the continent. He also prepared four original pamphlets – the *Articles of Peace* (May 1649), *Eikonoklastes* (October 1649; 1650), *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (February 1651), and *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda* (May 1654). Commissioned by the Council, these tracts alternately defended the new government and attacked its adversaries.

When, for example, *Eikon Basilike* was published in 1649 shortly after the king's execution, Milton was called upon to compose the government's official answer. Also known as the King's Book and allegedly containing Charles I's private meditations, *Eikon Basilike* ('Image of the King') was an almost immediate bestseller, prompting London printers to produce thirty-five editions in a single year. Milton's thankless task: to try to stem the tide of Royalist nostalgia. In his appropriately entitled *Eikonoklastes* ('image-breaker'), Milton attempted to shatter the image of the king as martyr. He literally broke *Eikon Basilike* into small quotations so that he could then, one by one, systematically refute its Royalist arguments.

Although such a methodical approach could not compete with the popular appeal of *Eikon Basilike*'s sentimentalism, Milton later had more success responding to the esteemed classical scholar Salmasius. At the request of the exiled Charles II, Salmasius had written *Defensio Regia pro Carolo I* (November 1649), an indictment of regicide and England's new government. In this case, Milton had the somewhat easier assignment of defending his country's actions against the censure of a foreigner; he no longer had to worry about the decorum of directly criticizing a deceased monarch.

The resulting pamphlet, *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, did more for Milton's reputation than any of his other writings during his lifetime. The relatively unknown Englishman challenged an international celebrity – and won. Appearing throughout Europe as his country's official spokesperson, Milton became famous, both at home and on the continent. People started coming to London expressly to meet the man who had defeated Salmasius, and some, according to seventeenth-century biographers, walked 'out of pure devotion' down Bread Street 'to see the house and chamber where he was born' (Darbishire, 48, 7). As during the antiprelatical and divorce controversies, Milton was relying on scripture as his ultimate authority; kingship is based on merit, he argued, and a people, even a minority of them, have the moral right to depose a tyrant. He once again attacked his opponent on every conceivable front, both his ideas and character. He insults Salmasius as a 'busybody', a 'grammerian', and a 'hireling pimp of

slavery' (YP 4: 457, 476, 461); he ridicules Salmasius's intelligence, motives – even his marriage. Milton asks contemptuously, 'What lad fresh from school, or what fat friar from any cloister, would not have declaimed on this ruin with greater skill and even in better Latin than this royal advocate?' (YP 4: 313).

Presumably, Milton cared more about the republic's principles than he did his annual salary of £288 13s. 6½d. As testimony to his conviction, he wrote nothing during his secretaryship that contradicts his other works, and, based on a cancelled entry in the Council's Order Books, he may have refused a monetary reward for his rebuttal of Salmasius. Nevertheless, in practical terms, which his detractors were quick to emphasize, Milton was working as a hired pen: a writer who earned his reputation and livelihood by attending to the wishes and, as a translator, the very words of others.

While Milton's writings are consistent with his earlier publications, some of his official duties seem to contradict his argument against pre-publication licensing in *Areopagitica*. During Milton's first years as secretary he worked more as a censor than translator. For over ten months, between 17 March 1651 and 22 January 1652, for example, the name 'Master Milton' is entered regularly in the Stationers' *Register* as licenser of one of the government's newsbooks, *Mercurius Politicus*. According to the Council's Order Books, Milton prepared only seven letters and wrote two translations during his first year as a government employee. If these records are complete, he found himself mostly policing the papers of people the government thought suspicious.

Modern critics have wondered how such an eloquent critic of censorship could serve as licenser and assist the republic in silencing opponents by seizing incriminating evidence. Had Milton's argument in *Areopagitica* been sincere, or merely politically expedient? From a manuscript report by the Dutch ambassador Leo ab Aitzema, we learn that Milton also may have licensed a heretical, Socinian manifesto known as *The Racovian Catechism*. This report would allow us to infer that he remained true to his tolerationist principles and did not take seriously his duties as licenser: in approving a pamphlet that the government later deemed blasphemous and dangerous, he was disregarding the government's interests in favour of his own beliefs.

But because there is so little evidence corroborating Aitzema's second-hand account, we ought to hesitate before using it to judge Milton as licenser. Rather than trying to make Milton into an autonomous, completely consistent author, we need to respect the effect of his changing historical circumstances. Milton had never ruled out the need to adapt his behaviour and modify his beliefs. In *Areopagitica* he argues that the process of truth requires an openness to change – that we will arrive at virtue

through 'triall, and triall is by what is contrary' (YP 2: 515). Milton vehemently attacked Episcopacy, yet wrote poems honouring the Bishops of Ely and Winchester; he criticized 'the troublesome and modern bondage of Riming' in a preface to *Paradise Lost*, but experimented with rhyme in many of his early verses; and he initially accepted a dualistic conception of the body and soul, but would become a materialist by the late 1650s. In like manner, Milton suddenly had the chance to help establish a republican form of government in 1649 by serving as licenser. Five years earlier when he predicted that all future licensers would be 'either ignorant, imperious, and remisse, or basely pecuniary' (YP 2: 530) he could not have foreseen this opportunity, nor the drastic political changes that had occurred during the interim.

Of all Milton's government writings, modern readers typically turn to *Defensio Secunda* for its information about the author. In *Regii Sanguinis Clamor* (1652) an anonymous writer had come to Salmasius's defence in maligning Milton and denouncing the English republic. *Defensio Secunda* consequently includes a long autobiographical digression, establishing both his lack of worldly ambition and his experience as a polemicist; here we learn about Milton's formal schooling, European travels, and his father's wishes. Because this tract devotes so much attention to Milton's life, we may be tempted to read it as the work of a single individual. But we need to remember that Milton was writing about himself in the middle of an international document, commissioned by the republic. As opposed to the autonomous authorial persona that Milton implies in many of his texts, he was again depending on a public occasion to compose his writings and define himself.

Milton's secretaryship represents another social site of authorship that he claims has distracted him from his poetic ambitions (YP 4: 627–8), but which in fact helped him to achieve his goals by enhancing his reputation, expanding his connections, and, in practical terms, providing him with an income. More importantly, working for the Commonwealth gave Milton the kind of firsthand experience that complemented his studies and enabled him to produce his later masterpieces, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regain'd*, and *Samson Agonistes*. These publications are not the work of an independent, reclusive poet and pedant; rather, they benefit from a combination of scholarship, inspiration, and the experiences of an author who knew both failure and compromise, and who would witness the censure and execution of many of his collaborators.

A series of personal tragedies while Milton still worked as secretary also contributed to the tone and manner of his later writings. As far as we can tell, he became completely blind in 1652; in the same year his wife died,

and the couple's only son, named after his father, died six weeks afterwards at fifteen months. In a letter to a friend, the diplomat and scholar Leonard Philaras, Milton recalled that his sight had worsened over roughly a ten-year period. He describes 'the darkness which is perpetually before me' as 'always nearer to a whitish than a blackish' and explains that his eyes, which still looked healthy, could sometimes glimpse 'a certain little trifle of light' (CM 12: 69).

Blind, widowed, and suffering from painful fits of gout, Milton probably found it difficult to raise his three daughters, Anne, Mary, and Deborah. The few surviving anecdotal accounts suggest that the author and his children did not get along well. A maid-servant remembered that Milton's daughters stole some of their father's books and had encouraged her to cheat him. On another occasion, when the maid-servant told Anne Milton of her father's intention to remarry, the young girl had allegedly replied that she would prefer to receive news of his death. We do not know whether Milton's second marriage improved or worsened the situation. Scant information survives about his second wife, Katherine Woodcock: twenty years her husband's junior, she married him on 12 November 1656. She died fifteen months later, having fallen ill after giving birth to their only child, who also died within a month.

Despite these personal losses and hardships, Milton remained active, both immediately before and for many years after the Restoration. Although his blindness and poor health probably reduced his official government duties, he had enough energy to revise *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (October 1658) and to compose *Pro Se Defensio* (August 1655), in which he violently upheld his claim from *Defensio Secunda* that Alexander More had authored *Regii Sanguinis Clamor*. Milton argues that all of a book's collaborators, regardless of their particular involvement, can be held responsible for a finished text.

During the final year of Milton's secretaryship, in the months leading up to the Restoration, he hastily composed five additional prose tracts, all of them addressing England's political and religious crisis. Within a year of Oliver Cromwell's death the country was on the verge of returning to monarchy, and Milton was scrambling to present remedies that would preserve a republican government. Events were occurring so rapidly, however, that by the time he had published the first edition of *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (February 1660), his proposal for a perpetual Long Parliament had become defunct. In the revised and much enlarged second edition (April 1660) he continued to endorse a permanent Grand Council, but here he already sounds unconfident about England's political prospects.

When Charles II returned to England the following month, on 25 May, the country once again became a monarchy. Milton was forced into hiding for three months, his books were publicly burnt, and, narrowly escaping execution, he was briefly imprisoned and fined. The former Secretary for Foreign Languages under the Commonwealth, Milton witnessed the disinterment, hanging, and mutilation of many of his friends and collaborators – ‘thir carkasses / To dogs and fowls a prey, or else captiv’d’, as he would allude in *Samson Agonistes* (693–4). In addition to exacting revenge on Commonwealth leaders and Cromwell’s supporters, the government under Charles II enacted a series of laws by which England resumed a general policy of absolutism. The government restricted individual liberty, resurrected universal censorship, and, despite an initial declaration to the contrary, re-established a rigid Episcopal church-government.

We might expect the author and former secretary to have responded to the country’s lost revolution by retreating from society; all the policies that he had worked for so passionately had suddenly been abrogated. But instead of withdrawing from society, as some critics have suggested, Milton remained social, no longer participating directly in politics, but continuing to host foreign visitors and to work closely with friends and acquaintances as he produced some of his greatest writings. Awakening at four in the morning, having someone read to him, and devoting some time to quiet contemplation, Milton was then ready to compose. The poet would sit ‘leaning Backward Obliquely in an Easy Chair, with his Leg flung over the Elbow of it’, and ask (as he sometimes called it) ‘to bee milkd’ – that is, he would dictate to an amanuensis the ‘good Stock of Verses’ that he had formulated during the previous night (Darbishire 6, 291, 33). In addition to soliciting his daughters’ aid, Milton asked his students to serve as his amanuenses. The seventeenth-century biographer Jonathan Richardson reports that Milton was ‘perpetually Asking One Friend or Another who Visited him to Write a Quantity of Verses he had ready in his Mind, or what should Then occur’ (Darbishire, 289).

Milton also continued to share manuscript copies of his works with students and visitors. Edward Phillips claims that he ‘had the perusal’ of *Paradise Lost* ‘from the very beginning’ and helped his uncle proof the poem, ‘which being Written by whatever hand came next, might possibly want Correction as to the Orthography and Pointing’ (Darbishire, 73). Another former pupil, Thomas Ellwood, was given a manuscript of *Paradise Lost* while calling on the author at his home in Chalfont in 1665. Ellwood’s account of the visit suggests that Milton actively sought the young man’s advice and willingly acted on his critical opinion. When months later Ellwood visited the author again, Milton showed him

Paradise Regain'd and 'in a pleasant Tone said to me, *This is owing to you: for you put it into my Head, by the Question you put to me at Chalfont; which before I had not thought of*' (199–200).

Around the same time that Milton was composing *Paradise Lost* he was probably doing most of the work on his theological treatise, *de doctrina Christiana*. John Aubrey lists a manuscript called 'Idea Theologiae' as one of Milton's last compositions; an anonymous seventeenth-century biographer also refers to the author 'framing a *Body of Divinity* out of the Bible'; and Edward Phillips similarly recalls his uncle collecting 'from the ablest of Divines . . . A perfect System of Divinity' (Darbishire, 9, 29, 61). Within the community of Milton scholars a debate has recently arisen whether the manuscript of *de doctrina Christiana*, discovered in the State Papers Office in 1823, represents the work that these early biographers are describing. At stake is Milton's theology, for although we can glean various heretical opinions from some of Milton's other works, most notably *Paradise Lost*, this treatise offers an explicit, systematic description of his heterodox beliefs.

Most of the historical and bibliographical data on this topic were assembled by Maurice Kelley in 1941 and remains unchallenged. We know that Milton possessed the manuscript of *de doctrina* by 1658, from which time he reworked and revised it with the aid of several amanuenses. We also know that Daniel Skinner, one of Milton's amanuenses who copied much of the manuscript's first half, attempted after the author's death to publish it as one of Milton's works along with his state papers. If Milton did not author the treatise, we must seek another mid-century Englishman, likely visually impaired – also an Arminian, monist-materialist, mortalist, divorcer, who was opposed to tithing, mandatory sabbath observance, and civil interference in religious affairs.

Although a full discussion of Milton's relationship to the treatise exceeds the scope of this essay, the debate over *de doctrina* helps to illustrate the problem of ignoring the social conditions of his authorship. The 1996 report, 'The Provenance of *De Doctrina Christiana*', by the committee that was formed to investigate the matter, for example, acknowledges that 'much of the manuscript probably constitutes a Miltonic appropriation and transformation' and identifies the prefatory epistle as Miltonic in style. But because Milton may not have produced every word of *de doctrina* – because its 'authorial genesis' seems 'much more complex' than his other works (108) – the report concludes that the treatise's 'relationship . . . to the Milton oeuvre must remain uncertain' (110).

We need not hedge on the question of Milton's authorship, however. Of course Milton did not produce *de doctrina* alone – but to hold any of his